

PUGET SOUND ADVOCATES FOR RETIREMENT ACTION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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**THURSTON MUSKELLY OF
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, LOCAL 1170
LESCHI COMMUNITY COUNCIL
CENTRAL AREA DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION
CENTRAL AREA SENIOR CENTER
PUGET SOUND ADVOCATES FOR RETIREMENT ACTION**

NARRATOR: THURSTON MUSKELLY

INTERVIEWERS: KAREN RICHTER, DAVID LOUD, TOM BYERS

SUBJECTS: PUGET SOUND ADVOCATES FOR RETIREMENT ACTION (PSARA); NORFOLK NAVAL AIR STATION; YOUNGSTOWN TUBING COMPANY; US PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE HOSPITAL; KING COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTHCARE COALITION; PACIFIC HOSPITAL PRESERVATION & DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (PHPDA); UPWARD MOBILITY PROGRAM; CATHOLIC SEAMEN'S CLUB; CENTRAL AREA SENIOR CENTER; LESCHI COMMUNITY COUNCIL; FLO WARE PARK; PEPPY'S PARK; AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES LOCAL 1117; COUNTRY DOCTOR; HARBORVIEW HOSPITAL; BLACK PANTHERS; HOOVER COMMISSION; MERCHANT SEAMEN; US MERCHANT MARINE; FLAGS OF CONVENIENCE (FOC); SEAMEN'S UNION; EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES ACT; WATERGATE; NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE CORPS; UNIFORMED SERVICE TREATMENT FACILITY; PACIFIC MEDICAL CENTERS; PUBLIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (PDA); US DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE (HEW) REGION 10; NATIONAL MARITIME UNION; CONGRESS OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS (CIO); RENDEZVOUS BAR; DR. WILLARD JOHNSON; BOB KAPLAN; DAVID LOUD; TOM BYERS; PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN; SENATOR WARREN "MAGGIE" MAGNUSON; MAYOR CHARLES ROYER; SENATOR HENRY M. "SCOOP" JACKSON; REBECCA "BECKY" JOHNSON; WILL PARRY; MAYOR GREG NICKELS; MAYOR PAUL SCHELL; CONGRESSMAN JIM MCDERMOTT; SECRETARY ELLIOTT RICHARDSON; PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON; SENATOR JOHN HEINZ; RAY PILGRIM; DR. RICHARD "DICK" TOMPKINS; SENATOR SLADE GORTON; DAVID STOCKTON; PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER; JOYCE C. ANDREWS MUSKELLY

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[BEGIN JUNE 12, 2019]

[00:00:00] **KAREN RICHTER:** This is Karen Richter and I'm with David Loud and Tom Byers with the Puget Sound Advocates of Retirement Action oral history project. We are interviewing Thurston Muskelly today at his home at 415 29th Avenue South in Seattle. Today is June 12, 2019, and this is a video interview.

Thank you, Thurston, for wanting to do this with us. Maybe we'll start with some general history of your family. Could you tell us your full name and a little bit about your family history—where your grandparents and your parents were born, and a little bit about them?

[00:01:06] **THURSTON MUSKELLY:** My name is Thurston D. Muskelly. I was born in Union, South Carolina, and was educated in Salisbury, North Carolina. My early education was in Union, South Carolina.

My grandfather built a church and a school. My mother's name is Eloise Muskelly. My father's name was Edward Muskelly.

My father was an engineer for the Southern Railway. He operated Engine #34. My mother was a professor in English. She taught at Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina.

My mother was 6'6" and weighed 250 pounds and wore a size 13 shoe. My father was 6'1", my height.

All of my education was created in Salisbury, North Carolina.

I had one sister and one brother, who are deceased. I'm the oldest child.

I went into the Navy in 1950. My mother and my father signed for me to go into the Navy. I was shipped from Salisbury, North Carolina, to San Diego, California, for boot training.

After I left boot training, I was put on the USS Albany, which is a heavy cruiser, and I was shipped into Korea. I stayed in Korea for two and a half years. In the first part of 1953, I was given shore duty, and I was shipped into Pensacola, Florida. There is a naval air station base there, Mainside.

After I was shipped into Florida, I met my wife, who is Joyce C. Andrews. I went into a place of business where she was working. She was a carhop, the one that brought the tray to the car. It was Joe Martin's Barbecue operation. She brought me my serving of a barbecue sandwich and I said, "You're a cute little thing." She said, "You're a foreigner, but I'll talk to you. I'm not afraid of you." That's how our courtship started.

For the last two days that I was off of duty, I would go and get a barbecue sandwich. I asked Joyce's mother for her hand on July 10, 1954. We were married in Louisville, Mississippi, in 1954.

In 1955, I was shipped out from Pensacola, Florida, to Norfolk Naval Air Station in Norfolk, Virginia. By the good grace in God, it was the same I just left, the USS Albany.

I was stationed in Norfolk, Virginia, for three years. I was discharged in Norfolk, Virginia. Joyce and myself made our home in Salisbury, North Carolina, which is my home. I worked for the VA Hospital for a year and a half. I left the VA Hospital after a year and a half and went to work in Youngstown, Ohio, as a crane operator in a steel mill. It was called Youngstown Tubing Company.

I worked there for four years. They had a strike. My brother-in-law at the time was a private tutor in Seattle, Washington, in English. He wrote my wife and asked her to come out here for a vacation. She came out here and she loved it so well that she said, "Thurston, why don't we move to Seattle?"

We moved to Seattle in 1958. I went to work for the US Public Health Service Hospital in 1962. I went to work there as a janitor. I was making \$1.73 an hour. After eight months, there was a German guy by the name of Mr. Munks. He came to me and said, "Mr. Muskelly, with your resume and with your knowledge and everything, and your educational background, I'm going to bring you into engineering."

So, I worked as a janitor for eight months and I moved from a janitor to an engineer within eight months. I stayed as an engineer until we lost a fight in saving the US Public Health Service Hospital.

My wife and I worked together on everything. I might be wrong, but in 1967 or 68, I met David Loud and Tommy Byers. There were a lot more but I can't recall their names, but anyway, we met in this living room.

[00:08:55] **KAREN:** How did you meet them?

[00:08:58] **THURSTON:** They were interested in healthcare. They were young, ambitious, and wanted to see something change in healthcare in Seattle. We met in this room here for, I guess, two or three years or longer.

We started working on healthcare, and then we got a new director over there at the hospital. His name was Dr. Willard Johnson. Willard was out of Texas. He was a really humble man. He was real good. He understood human needs and that type of thing.

He called me into his office one day and he said, "Thurston, I know that you're in charge of the union here at the hospital. I want to ask you for your help." He discussed that he had been in a meeting with the free clinics, and he had five percent of his hospital budget that he could donate to healthcare for people that didn't have healthcare and who couldn't afford to pay for healthcare. He would use the US Public Health Service Hospital as a backup for x-rays and lab work and for treating people that didn't have money for healthcare. I told him I would help him.

[00:10:56] **KAREN:** Can we go back for a little bit? You said you were in charge of the union. Can you tell us anything about how you got involved in the union and where that led you?

[00:11:06] **THURSTON:** A friend of mine—he's dead now—his name was Donald Fleets. He was in the union and they felt that the union was not presenting itself to the hospital administration what the needs of the employees were and that type of thing. He told me, "Thurston, you could be jeopardizing your job."

I came home that night and I talked to the wife and the wife said, "Well, you can always find another job." So, I ran for president and I won. We started communicating with the administration at the hospital. We started telling what could be best for the employees and the patients. That's how it all started.

Then Dr. Willard Johnson came. I realized that he was a Southerner, but he had great human touches. That's why I went along with him on being the president of the union.

I'd already met Tommy, I'd met David, and I guess they can fill in with the other guys. I think that Bob Kaplan was the lawyer. He was a Jewish guy. We all met here. That's how I got involved.

My job to Dr. Willard Johnson was to keep the groups informed, keep them up to date of what was going on, and how they could help to sustain this fight. That's what my involvement was.

[00:13:29] **DAVID:** Let me interject. The fight, which was really how we came to meet Thurston, was that the US Public Health Service Hospital here and all of its sister hospitals around the country were under a fairly immediate closure threat. The government was trying to close out that whole system of hospitals.

As Thurston explained, the incredibly important role that Willard Johnson played was to open the doors of the hospitals to referrals from the free clinics for things that the clinics could not provide, with the idea that if the community at large felt that it had more of a stake in the fate of the hospital, there might be a way to build the political opposition to closure.

The second thing he did was he introduced representatives of all the beneficiary groups of the hospital—the merchant seamen, the retired military, the Native Americans, the government employees and the free clinics—all to each other, and gave us a little encouragement.

And, yes, we formed a coalition, the Public Healthcare Coalition. From its inception in 1971, for many years after, past when the hospital was no longer federal in 1981, Thurston and Tom and I were on the steering committee of that coalition, along with others representing all the groups.

That was the context for closing Public Health Service, and we fought against that quite successfully. Ten years. We held off the wolves for 10 years. We had enough support in the community around the country that in 1981, when the Reagan administration was finally able to close the hospitals, we were able to cut a deal where the operation of the hospital could be taken over by an entity created by the city of Seattle, and Tom was very instrumental in creating the Pacific Hospital Preservation & Development Authority [PHPDA], which assumed operation of the hospital in 1981.

That story continues to this day, but that was through 1981, so we worked together with Thurston hand and glove for years and years and years.

[00:16:08] **KAREN:** I imagine, Thurston, it took a lot of getting to know elected officials in your work.

[00:16:14] **THURSTON:** Well, it was. Just like I said before, Maggie [Warren Magnuson] is the greatest senator in my time, and Maggie is the greatest senator of all time.

[00:16:28] **KAREN:** Can you say who that is, for the record?

[00:16:31] **THURSTON:** Yes. He had feelings, he had charisma. He was just an outstanding senator. He could work with anyone. And he had patience.

[00:16:52] **DAVID:** And he was head of the Appropriations Committee. [laughing]

[00:16:55] **THURSTON:** Yes, he was head of the Appropriations Committee. He didn't guarantee anything. He didn't give you any hope. He would celebrate when you celebrated. He was quite a fellow.

[00:17:17] **KAREN:** You got to know him really well.

[00:17:18] **THURSTON:** Yes.

[00:17:21] **KAREN:** Just for the audience that might not know his name, could you tell us his name?

[00:17:25] **THURSTON:** His name was Warren Magnuson, and they called him “Maggie” for short. He figured that the employees at the hospital would go the extra mile for the people that couldn’t afford healthcare. He gave them incentives. He set up a program called the Upward Mobility program. It was funded by the federal government.

The hospital employees would have to file for it. The executive board would select individuals that would attend college to advance their education. But we didn’t use their names, we used alphabetical order—A, B, C, D and on down the line. We didn’t know their names.

A lot of them got their PhDs. A lot of them went from LPNs to RNs. A lot of them went from nurse’s assistant to LPNs. Maggie made arrangements so they would be compensated—paid for their education if they were willing to go to school at night.

He was a great humanitarian. He was a great man. He ran the Washington delegation with an iron hand. What I mean by iron hand is everybody was on the same concept. Everybody knew what Maggie was going to fight for from the House of Representatives to the Senate.

He kept them informed. He was a great man of communications. I guess that’s where I learned a lot of it is the more people know the truth, then the truth will come out.

I’m proud to be here. I’m 86 years old. Me and my wife were married 64 years. This would have been our 65th but she passed away. If this house could talk, it would really tell you some things. But unfortunately, it can’t talk.

We gave a party here for Charles Royer. He became mayor. We also had other delegations from Washington that met here.

I was telling you about Maggie. We ran out of vodka and Maggie told me, “Thurston, we’re out of vodka. What’s wrong?” I said, “I have to go and get some, Senator.” I ran down to Second Avenue and a policeman, he was there, and he said, “Where are you going with all this vodka?” I said, “Senator Magnuson is down at the Catholic Seamen’s Club.” He said, “Where is your car?” I told him where my car was, and he drove up and he escorted me back to the Catholic Seamen’s Club for Maggie.

Even though Maggie loved to drink—everybody loves to drink, I love to drink—he still took care of business. Business came first. He was just an outstanding senator.

[00:21:50] **KAREN:** I think there’s a picture of him here we might want to—

[00:21:53] **THURSTON:** That’s a picture of Scoop Jackson [Henry M. Jackson] . Scoop Jackson was at the right hand of Maggie. Whatever Maggie wanted, Scoop would help him to get it. They were just two great guys. I enjoyed working with them.

[00:22:20] **TOM:** Thurston went back to Washington with a couple of us to lobby for the override of Nixon’s veto of the bill that Magnuson had put forward to save the hospital.

In 1973, Magnuson put forward a bill called the Emergency Health Services Act. Part of that bill would save the Public Health hospital system. Nixon vetoed the bill. The Senate promptly overrode but the House was closely split, and the coalition raised money to send Thurston and me and Rebecca Jones back to Washington to lobby for the veto override. I was asking Thurston to give us his memories of that trip.

[00:23:24] **THURSTON:** We went back and all three of us were nervous—quite nervous. We went back and we cut up. Becky Jones would take care of so many, Tommy would take care of so many and I would take care of so many.

We came up with [unintelligible] . We didn't want to hear "no" answers, or "No, we can't talk about it."

Tommy did an excellent job. Becky Jones did an excellent job. I did an excellent job, and we overran Nixon's veto. That's when we came back and celebrated at the Catholic Seamen's Club on First and Battery.

[00:24:36] **KAREN:** And that's where the vodka ran out.

[00:24:38] **THURSTON:** Yes, that's when the vodka ran out. [laughter]

[00:24:40] **KAREN:** Do you recall what the vote was to override?

[00:24:44] **THURSTON:** I don't recall, but I think he was defeated by six or seven votes.

[00:24:58] **TOM:** Actually, we lost by five votes. Thurston and Becky went home and I hitchhiked back to Seattle. I went by way of San Francisco, and I stayed with Willard Johnson, who was living there at that time. The time it took me to hitchhike across the country, Magnuson had taken the bill and amended it to the military budget, and Nixon couldn't veto that, so that's how we got it. [laughter] Magnuson was courageous. He was something else. He knew how to win.

[00:25:42] **KAREN:** You've met some remarkable people during the course of your life. You mentioned Will Parry.

[00:25:53] **THURSTON:** Will Parry and myself spent a lot of time together. Will Parry was on my executive board up at the Central Area Senior Center. Will was a very outstanding, strong man. He would tell you right quick. He didn't have a lot of finance, a lot of money, that he could spend, but he was willing to give his time and effort to a cause.

He was on my executive board up at the Central Area Senior Center and he did a remarkable job. Him and his son raised over \$5,000 for the senior center.

Right now, if he was living, I don't think the mayor would get rid of him because he was persistent. Will was very persistent. He went after things that people need and I was grateful to work with him on different things and different issues serving the old people, the seniors.

They have put in a bid to take over the senior center. The mayor insisted that she wants to build low-income housing on a site that is sliding. It needs to be rehabilitated because it slides all the time, but we want to keep it as a senior center for seniors in the Central area. But she's insisted on trying to build low-income housing.

[00:28:22] **DAVID:** I was just going to say, when Thurston retired from federal service in 1981, when the feds pulled out of the Public Health Service Hospital, he jumped right into community activism and became a very important person in a number of different things, including the president of the Leschi Community Council for a long spell. I don't know if you want to jump into that now, but that was your next career.

[00:28:52] **THURSTON:** I was 10 years president of the Leschi Community Center. The city gave me \$2.4 million to do three parks. I did [Provident Park?] , Flo Ware Park and Peppi's Park. At this time in age, there is funds left that are funds designated for those three parks, for repair work, for upkeep of the parks and all that kind of stuff.

The former mayors, like Mayor [Gregory] Nickels and Mayor . . .

[00:29:50] **DAVID:** McGinn?

[00:29:51] **THURSTON:** No, not McGinn. He wasn't impressive. Paul Schell. They gave me the money to do the parks. In fact, Paul Schell gave me matching funds to remodel the kitchen up at the senior center. We didn't have any cooking appliances to do any meals at the time and Paul Schell gave me matching funds to put in new appliances for the center.

Also, brought in the girls' school, which is on Jackson and Martin Luther King. The president of that organization came and talked to me and I convinced the Leschi Community Council that this is what we need. After we got the school in here, we ran all the

[END JUNE 12, 2019 at 00:31:02]

[BEGIN JUNE 27, 2019 at 00:31:04]

[00:31:03] **KAREN:** This is Karen Richter. I'm with the Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action or PSARA. We're conducting our oral history project today, and we're interviewing Thurston Muskelly at his home at 415 29th Avenue South, Seattle. It is June 27, 2019. This is a video interview.

Today, we're glad to welcome two of Thurston's dear friends, David Loud and Tom Byers. This is part two of our interview, and we're going to pick it up at the formation in 1968, I believe, of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 1117, from the formation of the union to when Thurston was elected president, and the events that followed.

Thurston, would you like to start, or David or Tom?

[00:32:00] **THURSTON:** I was elected president of the American Federation of Government Employees at the US Public Health Services Hospital. It was my first time being a chief spokesman for employees and the union.

We had an exciting executive board. I had people that really worked hard, worked together. We didn't have any animosity or any division in the union. We were very together on issues that were concerning employees, like employee education, and safety on the job and that type of thing, and also, promotions.

We worked hard with the administration. Dr. Willard Johnson was an outstanding CEO of the hospital. He understood the problems that the employees were facing. He took it hard. He was very concerned because the employees were not being treated fairly at the hospital up until they elected the American Federation of Government Employees as the union spokesman for the group.

We also represented the non-professionals and professionals and some doctors. In fact, one of the doctors that we represented was Congressman Jim McDermott. He was, I think, a doctor of psychiatry. We represented him and he went on to be one of our 37th District legislators on the federal side.

Dr. Willard Johnson started going out into the community and looking at prospects of people not getting adequate healthcare. He went to a meeting with these individuals that were really protesting about the health services in the city of Seattle. The health service in Seattle was ridiculous. It was just not taking care of people in Seattle. It's the same category as the homeless.

He went to a meeting and he told me that he suggested that he use five percent of the hospital budget to help these individuals to receive healthcare, and would the union work with him to provide these services? I went to

my executive board and we had a meeting on it. The union body agreed that we would participate in giving healthcare for individuals that couldn't afford healthcare in the city of Seattle.

Dr. Willard Johnson gave David Loud my telephone number, which I've had for 60 years. [laughter] David called me up and wanted to set up a meeting. We met in this house. I think it was five or six of us that came. Tommy was one of them. Bob Kaplan was one of them. And [unintelligible] . I think he turned out to be a priest, didn't he? Norm?

[00:37:02] **DAVID:** Oh, [Norm Englesberg?] .

[00:37:04] **THURSTON:** Yeah, [Norm Englesberg] . He turned out to be a priest.

[00:37:08] **DAVID:** Well, it would have been a rabbi, but he's in Israel. I've lost touch. [laughter]

[00:37:14] **KAREN:** And that's the first time you met Tom?

[00:37:17] **THURSTON:** I'll turn it over to David and Tom now. They can tell you the rest of it.

[00:37:22] **DAVID:** Why don't you explain the origin of the free clinics and that movement that got connected with Thurston?

[00:37:30] **TOM:** The context for the time that Thurston is talking about is a pretty dramatic moment in the history of Seattle, because Boeing had just laid off two-thirds of its workforce. People were leaving town in droves because the unemployment was so high. In fact, there were billboards in Seattle that said "Will the last person to leave please turn off the lights?"

With so many people unemployed, free clinics started to spring up. I was involved with a number of other people who actually came out of the anti-Vietnam War movement in starting a clinic on Capitol Hill at that time called Country Doctor.

Initially, there were several clinics in the housing projects and a variety of clinics. The Black Panthers had started a clinic. The Indians had started a clinic, and the Public Health Service Hospital, where Thurston was president of the union during that time.

The early clinics were relying on Harborview for backup lab tests and x-rays and so on. Harborview had just been taken over by the University of Washington. To be honest, they were frightened about the economics they were facing in the community and whether they could make it as a hospital with so many people uncovered, so they cut off the support they were providing to the clinics.

The Panthers led the protest that Thurston just described. It got pretty heated. There was a meeting with the head of Harborview and his folks, and when the meeting got really heated, Willard stood up in the back of the room and said, "I'm Willard Johnson. I lead the hospital on the other side of the gorge over there on Beacon Hill. A lot of you don't know about the Public Health Service Hospital, but we take care of federal beneficiaries—merchant seamen, military retirees, Native Americans. But I've been reading my regulations, and according to my regulations, I can take up to five percent of my patients as interesting teaching cases. If we can work it out, I'll just assert that everybody that is referred to me from a community clinic is an interesting teaching case."

That was the way that the unemployed and the poor found their way into the Public Health Hospital, and that was why I became involved with many others in the coalition that David and Thurston were building.

[00:40:53] **DAVID:** For context on this local story, and what Willard Johnson did. After World War II, the federal government put together a Hoover Commission to study the role of the federal government in national life in all areas. In 1953, the Hoover Commission came out with this report regarding healthcare.

Their recommendation was that the federal government get out of the business of delivering healthcare to anybody, but instead, regulate, finance, particularly for those who were entitled by law to healthcare from the federal government.

The merchant seamen were the primary beneficiaries of this hospital system, going back to 1798, with the act for the relief of sick and disabled seamen. To make a very long story short, out of that, in 1798, grew—100 years later or so—the US Public Health Service.

The division of hospitals and clinics of the US Public Health Service was that core of about 20 hospitals and many freestanding clinics that served the primary beneficiaries—the merchant seamen—and, as Tom said, added to that, over time, commercial fishermen, retired military and their dependents, and all other people entitled to federal healthcare, including injured federal employees.

Starting in 1953, based on the recommendations of the Hoover Commission, the government began closing these hospitals one by one. The timing was important because the US Merchant Marine reached its peak in World War II. After World War II it dropped off quickly, a lot not because there wasn't shipping, but because the war was over and the American shipping companies wanted to get away from the unions that were establishing their voice and their rights to safe working conditions and decent pay and so forth.

They wanted to register their ships in the so-called flags of convenience—Panama, Liberia, those of that league, and others—so that they were not subject to American unions and American labor laws and health and safety requirements in US law.

So, the US flag fleet declined precipitously after World War II, and that's why the Public Health Service was the weak link in the chain of federal medicine, and was the first target of closure to convert it to pay the private sector to take care of the people the feds were obligated to serve.

Their targets would include the Defense Department, believe it or not, the VA, the Indian Health Service, but they didn't get around to those. They started with the Public Health Service. By the time Willard Johnson came to that meeting and offered to open the doors to the community, there were only eight hospitals left and a handful of freestanding clinics.

This was a bipartisan affair, as HEW Secretary Elliot Richardson told us when we forced him into a meeting after our coalition got going. "We don't believe the federal government should do anything that somebody else can do for a profit." That was the philosophy at that time with the Nixon administration.

Willard, who had done a career in the Navy as a physician and now was in the commission for the Public Health Service had seen these hospitals get picked off, one by one, had calculated correctly that if the community at large felt it had a stake in the survival of this institution, there might be a basis for a political opposition that would be strong enough to make a difference.

He went to Thurston first, it sounds like—that's a detail I didn't know—to get the union support for this project. Then he helped Thurston identify, who are the leaders and the representatives of the other beneficiary groups that had a stake, including now the free clinics? So, we managed to find each other and put together a proposal to keep the hospital open and improve it and expand it and democratize it so it would be better able to serve its patients and the community.

That's how we met Thurston, because Willard hoped there would be a coalition effort. He gave the information and the contacts to Thurston and us and we did it. In October 1971, we launched the coalition. That was on a Saturday. We had this big meeting with people from all the beneficiary groups and the employees and the big clinics and we adopted this program. Monday morning, Willard was fired for having let the beneficiaries meet in the hospital.

So, we circulated a petition, and got 30,000 signatures in a matter of weeks to get Willard back, and that didn't succeed. He went on to an honorable career as a physician in the shipping industry down in San Francisco. But we were off and running.

[00:46:57] **KAREN:** Can you talk about who the coalition members are?

[00:47:03] **THURSTON:** That was my job. Willard made sure that every group was very knowledgeable of what was going on. In other words, he wanted great communication. My job was to contact the free clinics, the Seamen's Union, the retired military people, the Indians and everybody else that was tied in with the US Public Health Services.

Willard would make sure that I would go and tell these groups when the meetings were, what the subject was about, and he was going to tell them what service he could get or how to go about getting it. That's the role that I played. My people in the union were committed to serve all beneficiaries of the US Public Health Service hospitals, and the free clinics became a beneficiary of the US Public Service Hospital.

Also, after this coalition was formed, Maggie—Senator Magnuson—put out an incentive program called Upward Mobility. The federal government paid for these incentive programs through the Appropriations Committee that he was chair of.

He sent all the employees that wanted to attend college, such as Shoreline. If they wanted to move up from being a RN and got their master's and got their PhDs, they could go to college and do that. Or if they wanted to move up from LPNs to nurses, they went to school and they got that, too. Also, the nurse's aides moved from nurse's aides to LPNs, and some of them eventually got to RN. They got their BA.

They were given incentives to help these individuals that couldn't afford healthcare. Maggie was a great force in this. Magnuson called me every morning at 6:00. I'd be at the hospital. He would want to know what was going on, how it was going on, what he needed to do back in Washington, D.C. and that type of thing.

When the Nixon administration threatened to close the hospital, he asked me, did I have people that would come from Seattle to lobby the Congress to help save this hospital? Tommy Byers volunteered, and Becky Jones came back with me to lobby the Congress. We did it in, I think, eight or 10 days. Maggie figured out a way to block Nixon from closing that hospital. Tommy knows the situation on that.

I had lobbied in Washington, D.C. before. I had experience. Tommy and Becky didn't, so I had to teach them how to go about lobbying Congress. You had to make your statement within five minutes because they wouldn't give you any more time than just five minutes. You couldn't stand there and talk to them for 10 minutes or half an hour. They only gave you five minutes when you lobbied.

I expressed to them that's what we had to do, and we divided it up. I would take so many, Becky would take so many. These were key people that Magnuson told us to go and talk to to help get this bill passed to save this hospital. That's what we did.

[00:52:38] **TOM:** Can I add a little bit to that?

[00:52:40] **THURSTON:** Yeah, go ahead, Tommy.

[00:52:42] **TOM:** In the summer of 73, Magnuson led the passage of a bill called the Emergency Medical Services Act. Part of that bill was saving the Public Health Hospital system of hospitals and clinics. Nixon vetoed the bill. Then the adventure that Thurston described was the attempt to override its veto.

The Senate, where Magnuson was very powerful, overrode with no trouble, but the House was more difficult. That's when we went back and we were lobbying mostly Republicans to try to get them to support the override of Nixon's veto.

This was at a period of time when the Watergate hearings were going on and Nixon was vulnerable, so this override became a test of his strength, and he put everything he had into it. It was a very dramatic, seesaw battle when we were walking the halls of Congress because we would think we had somebody's vote and then Nixon would get to them and we wouldn't have it anymore. The critical five votes were delivered by [Senator] John Heinz of Pennsylvania. I'll never forget that name. He brought five "moderate" Republicans over to Nixon's side and we lost by five votes.

Thurston and Becky went back to work with David and Bob Kaplan, our attorney, to try to fight them in court. I decided to hitchhike back and hitched across the country. I stopped in San Francisco, where I stayed with Willard Johnson and Judy [Ezmack?]. By the time I managed to get across the country by hitchhiking, Magnuson had taken the Emergency Medical Services Act and tacked it onto the defense budget. Nixon couldn't veto the defense budget, so that the way that hospital was saved at that time.

[00:55:08] **DAVID:** I just want to have a word about the makeup of this coalition, because it was pretty remarkable. As Tommy mentioned, some of the people who were involved in organizing the free clinics from the getgo came out of the antiwar movement.

In our coalition, therefore, were antiwar activists—and the war was still going on—and the retired military, who were a very important part of our coalition, and didn't quite see things that way for the most part. We also had the commercial fishermen and the Native Americans, who were at odds over fishing rights.

What we were successful in doing was building a coalition that was so committed to what united us, which was healthcare is a right, and we want to defend this institution and make it serve the community, and set an example for the nation. That unity was stronger than the differences that existed.

Another example, the merchant seamen. They were the primary beneficiaries from 1798. There was federal money involved in the system, but they had wages deducted for the marine hospitals. The hospital that was built here in 1931-33, a lot of the money to build that hospital on land donated by the city came from the seamen's wages, that historical fund.

So, they had a very, very strong sense of ownership. This was our hospital. This is our system. When the proposition was, okay, we're going to open the doors to the community, not everybody liked that idea at first, and there was a whole effort to help people understand that the only way to save their hospital was by saving it for us all.

Ray Pilgrim, rest in peace, was the port agent for the National Maritime Union. He was a key part of our steering committee, and he was the chair of our coalition for years, until he was reassigned to Philadelphia in 1978. He was very effective at bringing the seamen unions together, who had their own rivalries amongst themselves, historically, between the CIO and the AFL and all manner of splitting points. But he was able to bring them together.

Even on Maggie, I will say, Maggie was our great champion. Without Maggie, none of this would have been possible. But in 1973, before Magnuson had that great legislative accomplishment, Nixon was moving hard on closing hospitals, despite what legislation that had been passed the year before that we thought protected—before you could close one of these, you had to meet a set of criteria.

Well, Nixon moved right ahead at the beginning of 73 to close anyway. And at one point, Maggie told us, “You guys, the writing’s on the wall. I’m sorry, but you’ve just got to see the writing’s on the wall?”

We organized a demonstration at the hospital, and the merchant seamen, led by the National Maritime Union, came marching up from the waterfront carrying these signs: “Why is Maggie lagging?” Think about this. Maggie was their great champion, and they had always supported him. Why is Maggie lagging?

We had a demonstration. Willard came back from San Francisco. We were violating federal law, I’m sure, to be there doing that right on the grounds. But, my golly, Maggie never lagged after that.

I want you to speak to this, Tom, but we held off the wolves for 10 years, and we came very close to realizing a dream of building on this nationally. Why don’t you talk about that, Tom?

[00:59:29] **TOM:** When Carter was elected, the attitude of the government toward the hospitals began to change. Carter wasn’t sure what to do with this little cluster of eight hospitals. He appointed a commission, chaired by Edward [Sayward?] —a very distinguished doctor—to explore what the future of the Public Health Service hospitals ought to be.

Magnuson got me on that commission and we visited every single Public Health Service hospital over the course of six months and looked at what they had going on, and the conditions there, and the occupancy rates and so on. By this time, because of Willard and Thurston and the example that they set, Seattle had brought in a new director named Dick Tompkins, who was a firecracker.

He had started where Willard had left off. Brought in a lot of young docs and cemented the relationship with the community clinics, and started to imagine how to carry out the vision that the Public Healthcare Coalition had come up with of expanding the hospital to meet the unmet needs of the city.

We got National Health Service Corps doctors into the clinics. We got them into the jails. So, the hospital began to back up these other public systems, like the Health Department. The finding of that commission was that all the Public Health Service hospitals ought to replicate what had been done in Seattle. It was called the Seattle model.

Just as they were getting started in trying to make that conversion, the 1980 election took place, and Reagan was elected and Magnuson lost his seat.

[01:01:58] **DAVID:** But we had built up enough political support in this area and around the country, so by the time of the 1980 elections, we had built up such strong community and political support in this area, and had catalyzed that in the other ports where the hospitals still existed, that the Republican freshman senator who defeated Magnuson in that election, Slade Gorton, actually understood that he needed to follow through.

He talked to David Stockman, Reagan’s budget guy, and they cut a deal where any of these facilities where there was a local organization willing to take it over and serve the beneficiary population that it had been serving could do so, and could get federal start-up money. In the case of Seattle, we got \$26M.

Shortly after that, after the feds were finally pulling out, Senator Scoop Jackson amended a military appropriations bill in December. I think it was Christmas Eve or something close to that. Was it Christmas Eve?

[01:03:37] **TOM:** Yeah, it was.

[01:03:38] **DAVID:** Designating any of these surviving Public Health Service facilities under local control as a uniformed service treatment facility, something new under the sun. It never existed before. What that meant was the Defense Department was obligated to pay the hospital to take care of its beneficiaries.

That was a generous enough bit of funding and reimbursement that helped carry the hospital for a considerable time as it faced the challenge of surviving in this jungle of a marketplace of healthcare that we have.

I wanted to make sure that we keep pointing out the absolutely critical role that Thurston and the union at the hospital played as an anchor in all of this. I went to work there in 1978. I got a job as a patient advocate, which was one of the many points of our coalition program that got implemented. I was working there for three years before the feds pulled out, and I got to see more up close and personal than I had previously just what a leader Thurston was in that place, and how he was absolutely fearless in taking on any challenge there, whether it was fixing the laundry machine or dealing with a director who had a different idea about what to do.

Enough from me for now.

[01:05:36] **THURSTON:** I had some difficulties and most of it was employees getting promoted and educated on the job and that type of thing. We owned, within the union, that a junior worker could get cooperation from the senior worker in the department, like the x-ray technician, or the lab technician, or the janitor that cleaned up the emergency rooms and stuff like that. We fixed it so the employees could get advanced education through that type of a system.

I had some employees I could tell—directors, or either people like over in the kitchen, the director over the kitchen, the director over pathology—different folks had different ideas, and sometimes it was very complicated.

When everything was going smoothly, they called me Thurston. [chuckles] When everything got bad, they called me Mr. Muskelly. I had sensed that by me pushing and making them do what they had to do, there wasn't no sense for them to go to Dr. Willard Johnson because he was strongly behind me when he was there.

I had problems with Dr. Tompkins. He told me once, "Thurston, you know I could kick your A-S-S," and I said, "If you do, they'll call you Pegleg from now on. You'd be one leg less."

I had strong opposition. They checked my telephone calls, they checked everything, but I had a credit card from the union. I could use their equipment but I didn't charge anything to the federal government. So, it was sometimes hectic. Sometimes, it was good, sometimes it was bad. But I dealt with it until I left the hospital when Reagan closed the hospital. I think it was 1980.

[01:08:49] **KAREN:** How did that come about? How did Reagan get to close the hospital?

[01:08:55] **THURSTON:** That was the writing on the wall. I don't know why the people in the state of Washington voted Maggie out. They went for this young man, which was Slade Gorton. I didn't think too much of Slade Gorton. The reason I didn't think too much of him is because he was there to destroy healthcare, and I think that's one of the reasons.

Another thing was he talked about Maggie personally, that he was a drunk and all this kind of stuff, but you must realize that Maggie delivered on everything he mostly touched. He didn't waver on too many things.

I gave him credit for him standing up, because when we went back to Washington, D.C., he said, “Thurston, I’m not guaranteeing anything. This is a gamble.” I liked that attitude. We worked hard to save the hospital.

[01:10:24] **TOM:** Can I just clarify one thing?

[01:10:26] **THURSTON:** Yeah.

[01:10:28] **TOM:** It is true that Reagan succeeded in getting the Public Health Service Hospital out of the federal government, but as David pointed out, the movement in Seattle had become so strong, and the political support so deep, that we were able to convert the hospital to local control under the direction of a Public Development Authority. That Public Development Authority still owns the big building on Beacon Hill and the grounds.

The [unintelligible] evolved over time because Seattle, in that period of time, had way too many hospital beds, so the PDA evolved into a network of outpatient clinics under the name Pacific Medical Centers. There are now 10 of those around the region, including one in the hospital. They care for about 100,000 of our neighbors, so the institution in a new form continues, largely because the coalition has waged that fight for years and years and years.

[01:11:51] **DAVID:** Let me add to that. The hospital would not have survived if it hadn’t opened its doors to the free clinics and allowed the development of that broad coalition. The clinics thrived over time, and have become a really important part of the healthcare delivery system in this whole area—across the country, too, but we have a very strong set of community health centers in the Seattle area and King County that would not be what they are if they had not had the backup services of the Public Health Service Hospital for 10 years free. Free. All the community clinic patients who came up to the hospital from 1971 to 1981, there was no billing. That was the five percent of the budget that was allocated that they were able to use for that purpose.

My point being that there was this absolutely symbiotic relationship between the fate of the Public Health Service and the fate of community health, and it’s a success story.

[01:13:12] **TOM:** Today, you pointed out, when we were sitting on the porch, that Pacific Tower is the home of all the health training programs of the Seattle College, and 18 non-profits and eight state legislators have their district offices there. All the lease payments from all those folks go to the Public Development Authority that was chartered to save the hospital to be used as grants to improve the care of the poor. What was started 50 years ago has morphed and changed in shape, but the spirit of it and the values of it are totally consistent with what these guys imagined.

[01:13:58] **DAVID:** Yeah, so that building and what goes on there is an important part of healthcare today, and is a fulfillment of this notion that healthcare is a right.

[01:14:14] **TOM:** I want to go back to some of the tactics that you guys and Ray and the others employed during the period of time between 1973 and 1980, when it was still a federal hospital, but the folks in D.C., up until Carter was elected, were still trying to kill it.

One of the ways—you will remember this—they tried to kill it was to short the nurses. There was a big nursing shortage. Thurston brought that to everybody’s attention and we had a coalition meeting in which we said, “We’ve got to get more nurses. What should we do? Should we have another march?”

Because we'd done three or four big marches by that time and the military folks were getting a little uneasy with this antiwar tactic of marching. It was decided, after a lot of debate, that we would picket the offices of Health, Education and Welfare, but we'd do it by telephone.

We took the coalition and we divided it up. Military retirees would take 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., and the fishermen would take 10:00 to 12:00, and the community clinics would take 12:00 to 3:00 and so on. The idea was this: Call every number at the headquarters of HEW here in Seattle until they can't do any business.

At the end of the first day, the head of HEW Region 10 called me up and said, "What the hell are you doing?" I told him, "We need more nurses, and we're not going to stop until we get more nurses." The next day, Thurston got the message that they approved more nurses. Did I get that straight:?

[01:16:15] **THURSTON:** Yes. The director of Region 10 called me and he said, "I don't know what kind of union official you are, but you don't ask for telephones to be removed, you don't ask for furniture to be moved around, you ask for big stuff." So, I enjoyed that when they shut down HEW. [laughter]

I was grateful. This was Willard's dream. He's dead now, but he was the person—the key person—that said he had five percent, and he used that five percent like a musician. He brought all of this together. He brought me into it and he brought a lot of other people into it. All of them are dead now, except me. I'm the last survivor.

[01:17:45] **TOM:** Hey, Thurston, we're still here. [laughter]

[01:17:46] **THURSTON:** Yeah, I know you're still here, but I'm talking about the ones that worked with Willard. All of them are gone.

[01:17:58] **TOM:** Talk a little bit about Ray Pilgrim and your friendship.

[01:17:59] **THURSTON:** Pilgrim was a powerful, outspoken man. He was a good man, but if you rubbed him the wrong way, you had a tiger by the tail.

I remember at Providence Hospital, HEW put out a notice that they were going to move patients from the US Public Health Service Hospital to private hospitals. Ray was in a meeting, and I was with him, and all of you guys were with him. Bob Kaplan was with him. He told them, "If you touch any patient, or touch the hospital, you will not be operating tomorrow."

One of the stupid administrators said, "What do you mean, we won't be operating?" He said, "You won't have supplies. You won't have anything in this hospital that you can use because I will contact the Teamsters and shut you down."

He was an outstanding, strong leader. I remember the time that when we first started out, the FBI used to put us to bed. When we'd leave the meeting, there would be a black car or a gray car following us. Ray said, "Don't even look back. Don't even think about it. When you go against the federal government, the federal government's got watchdogs. They're going to put us to sleep. They're going to see what we doing after we leave the meeting."

So, I would take Ray home, and sure enough, they followed me all the way to here until I opened up the gate and parked my car and came into the house. Then they would leave.

But Ray Pilgrim was powerful and strong, and he led this coalition like we never had before.

[01:20:33] **KAREN:** Was he in your union?

[01:20:37] **DAVID:** No, the National Maritime Union.

[01:20:41] **THURSTON:** He was in the National Maritime Union.

[01:20:42] **DAVID:** He was the port agent of the National Maritime Union. He had come up through the ranks. He helped organize some actions when he was a working seaman on passenger ships, I believe. He came from St. Lucia in the Caribbean.

He worked his way up in the ranks of the National Maritime Union, which was the Seamen's Union in the Congress of Industrial Organizations [CIO] , not with the AFL. They recognized his leadership, and he was very effective.

[01:21:16] **THURSTON:** Oh, yes, he was quite a fellow.

[01:21:20] **TOM:** The first demonstration was when they came up the hill on Union Street. HEW's headquarters were in the building at 2nd and Union, and we were protesting in front of HEW headquarters. The coalition was brand new, and as David pointed out, not everybody saw the world in exactly the same way.

There were a lot of people from the clinics there, and a lot of them were antiwar folks, and a lot of us had hair down to here. But the Maritime Union guys came up the hill, turned and saw us, and froze in their tracks, the guys carrying the banners, like, wait a minute, what are we doing with this motley crew? [laughter]

Ray, who is a big guy with a big wingspan, and a cigar always in his mouth, came up behind the guys carrying the flag, grabbed two of them by the shoulders, and shoved them into line. We got a lot. We started talking and joking, and the first thing we knew, we had a whole bunch of new friends. But I'll never forget that. He was quite the guy.

[01:22:41] **THURSTON:** Yeah, he was like a bull. He was strong. He was a good man.

[01:22:47] **TOM:** The truth is, you and Ray didn't always go straight home.

[01:22:50] **THURSTON:** Oh, no. We would stop by and have a drink.

[01:22:54] **TOM:** And invite the young people.

[01:22:58] **THURSTON:** Yeah, at the Rendezvous.

[01:22:59] **TOM:** It was like a seminar in organizing.

[01:23:01] **DAVID:** The Rendezvous wasn't a fashionable place then. It was a waterfront bar. We met every Tuesday for close to 10 years. Every Tuesday, the steering committee met at the Catholic Seamen's Club at First and Battery on the first floor, which is now a club. The Seamen's Club is still upstairs.

After those meetings, quite often we'd go together to the Rendezvous. I learned from Ray some tips about rum, although mostly, what he was drinking there was vodka, but he was a connoisseur of rum.

I have a question for you that I don't know if I've asked you, not for a long time, anyway. With all of your dedicated activities—as union president, as leader in the Public Healthcare Coalition—how did that all play here at home with Joyce?

[01:24:14] **THURSTON:** It was great. Joyce was a leader within herself, and she would use me as her sounding board and I would use her as my sounding board. She was an outstanding individual. She wanted to help people

that didn't have help. That's why she spent a lot of time down at Leschi School and up at the Senior Center. She also spent a lot of time at the Tabernacle Baptist Church.

Joyce came from a good family. Her brother was a tutor. He graduated from Seattle U. He would always tell her, "I got you by 10 years, and I've got Muskelly by about eight years. You all can't tell me nothing." [laughing]

But Joyce was a great person. She would be my sounding board and I would be hers. She greeted everybody that came to this house as if they lived here. She didn't care. She just was that kind of person. She understood what we were doing and how we were doing it.

Sometimes she would make a suggestion. She would talk to Ray about it. She would talk to me about it. Sometimes me and Ray would come in here and just sit at the table and she would ask us what we were going to do about the closure, or what were we going to do about the nursing shortage? That kind of stuff. I guess she kept Ray thinking, too.

[01:26:38] **DAVID:** By the way, Thurston's life since 1981, when the feds pulled out of the hospital and he retired from the federal civil service, that's the whole next chapter of his life, in which he continued to be a leader and an organizer in the community in many ways. That's going to be the subject of another interview, I believe.

[01:27:07] **THURSTON:** Yeah.

[01:27:10] **KAREN:** I think you had some pictures that you wanted to show us. There's a picture of you and Scoop Jackson, I think, over there, and there are a few others. Can we look at them and maybe get a picture?

[01:27:24] **THURSTON:** Sure. He was a great help to me [referring to Senator Jackson] .

[01:27:29] **KAREN:** Here's another one. This is the one I was thinking of.

[01:27:34] **DAVID:** That's Senator Jackson.

[01:27:34] **THURSTON:** Yeah, that's Scoop before he died.

[01:27:44] **KAREN:** I know there are so many more of them here in the house.

[01:27:47] **DAVID:** And for show-and-tell, this is a button that was produced as part of the national pushback against closure of the Public Health Service hospitals. It says, "USPHS" and it gives the logo of the US Public Health Service. "Save our system. SOS."

Because what we did here not only set an example for how the rest of the system might evolve, but it also catalyzed political resistance to closure that had not really amounted to much before. But now, it was in all the ports, where people were speaking up about it.

[01:28:28] **KAREN:** So remarkable.

[END JUNE 27, 2019]